

Kiwanis, Kohl's and Kids

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REDLANDS - Standing in front of shelves stocked with brightly colored shirts, Madison Worthington and Sarah Rosales debated which ones to choose.

"This one has a monkey on it," said Madison, holding up a brown shirt with a picture of a smiling chimpanzee on it.

"Oh, I want that one," said Sarah, adding it to the growing array of clothes she held in her arms.

Debates about which shirts to choose, which pants fit best and which shoes were the coolest raged at Kohl's department store in Redlands Friday morning.

Opening their doors at 7 a.m., Kohl's welcomed 60 youths from the Boys & Girls Club of Redlands for a back-to-school shopping spree.

Teamed up with Kiwanis and Kohl's volunteers, the kids had the run of the store and \$100 to pick out outfits for the new school year.

"We've been doing this for decades," said P.T. McEwen, chief executive officer of the Boys & Girls Club of Redlands. "In the past we've done it at Mervyn's, but this year, with the help of the Kiwanis Club and Kohl's, we were able to move it over here."

McEwen said that with the help of a \$5,000 donation from the Redlands Noon Kiwanis Club and a \$2,000 donation from Kohl's, the club were able to help a lot of their kids from low-income households.

"We try and take the neediest of needy and help them get their back-to-school stuff," McEwen said. "And what's great is that Kohl's does not charge sales tax on the items and the kids get an additional 15 to 20 percent off their purchase."

After forming a line outside the store in the early hours Friday, each child was paired with a volunteer to assist them in their shopping.

Talk of what type of shorts they would be looking for and whether or not a new jacket was needed filled the air as the kids anxiously awaited their chance to shop.

"The kids get really excited for this," said Boys & Girls Club site director Roberto Martinez. "Some of them were up as early as 5 a.m. to be here.

"And it's a big help for the parents. Some of these families have five or six kids and it can get really expensive. So this hopefully takes some of that burden off of them, and at the same time gets the kids excited to start school."

Vanessa O'Donnell Bernardo, manager of the Redlands Kohl's, said the store was "happy to get involved in such a great cause."

"We always are trying to give back to Redlands and this is a great way to do it," Bernardo said. "And hopefully we can continue this in the future."

Besides \$100 worth of clothes, the kids received a backpack full of school supplies and a full breakfast.

"It's wonderful to see how excited they all get," said Harriet Foucher, Highland Morning Kiwanis Club president. "We have Kiwanis members from all over here helping out because we all want to be a part of this great event."

Their arms full of shirts and pants, Madison and Sarah made their way to the changing room to try on their choices.

Following close behind, Kohl's employee and volunteer Sandy Wagner could not help but smile.

"They're having so much fun," Wagner said. "And that's what this is all about."

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